

Developing a Culturally-Responsive Classroom Collaborative

Paul J. Colbert, Johnson & Wales University

Abstract

Culture is integral to the learning process. It is the organization and way of life within the community of students and teachers and directs the way they communicate, interact, and approach teaching and learning. Although founded in particular values and principles, the academy, like most organizations, is impacted day-to-day by its culture. Yet, the traditional higher education institution has not been designed to operate within a racially or ethnically diverse student population. The social, political, economic, and cultural forces that support the institution influence the teaching and learning environments. To better address cultural diversity in the classroom, faculty must first examine their own cultural background and understand how biases may affect their interactions with students. To advance teaching and learning in the college classroom requires an understanding of the underlying values, beliefs, perceptions and assumptions of students, which affect their understanding of what they hear and read as well as how they express themselves in the classroom. When teachers recognize these different qualities, classroom instruction can be designed to connect content to students' backgrounds.

This paper examines one approach to building a teaching and learning community through faculty professional development and collaboration. It provides an overview of a 5-part workshop series conducted for faculty at the Johnson & Wales University Providence campus on intercultural learning and culturally responsive teaching. Focusing on the essential components of personalizing culture through the five institutions of family, school, religion, politics, and economics through workshop activities, it is an investigation of individual and institutional backgrounds to determine how faculty may recognize the forces that influence student behavior, and how to engage them in a more active learning process.